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**Making connections and thinking through emotions:  
between geography and psychotherapy**

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# **Making connections and thinking through emotions: between geography and psychotherapy**

## **Abstract**

The current upsurge of interest in emotions within geography has the potential to contribute to critical perspectives that question conventional limits to scholarship. Three precursors of emotional geographies are discussed in this context (humanistic, feminist and non-representational geographies). Connections between emotional geographies and psychotherapy are explored with a view to resisting the equation of emotion with individualised subjective experience, and developing situated, relational perspectives. Psychotherapy is approached as a theory of practice that accords central importance to affective qualities of relationships, which is shown to be directly relevant to geographical engagements with emotion. The distinction between feelings and representations of feelings is revisited through a discussion of psychotherapeutic meaning-making.

## **Key words**

Emotion, psychotherapy, relationality, symbolisation

# **Making connections and thinking through emotions: between geography and psychotherapy**

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the term "emotion" has begun to crop up with increasing frequency in the work of human geographers. In this article, I reflect on conceptualisations of emotion informing this work, and I argue that psychotherapeutic thinking offers valuable resources for developing emotional geographies. Sociologist Simon Williams (2001, 1) recently observed that emotion has often figured as the "scandal' of reason", so that questions of emotion have long been "[b]anished to the margins of Western thought and practice". In this context, the burgeoning of geographical work on emotion can be understood as a testament to the flourishing within the discipline of critical perspectives willing to question conventional limits to scholarship. But the introduction of emotion into the vocabulary of geographical scholarship does not necessarily challenge dominant ideas about what constitutes knowledge. Having excluded emotions from knowledge that counts, it is perfectly possible that emotions might now be admitted in ways that allow the business of geography to proceed "as normal". This article is motivated in part by my concern that emotions and emotional life might be too safely contained within, and too severely limited by, conceptual framings that evacuate the radical potential of this new work (compare Callard 2003; Thrift 2004). In elaborating this concern, I argue for an approach to emotion that persistently unsettles claims to the position of the rational knower, thereby retaining the critical edge promised by emotional geographies. At the core of my argument is a plea for emotion to be approached not as an object of study but as a relational, connective medium in which research, researchers and research subjects are necessarily immersed.

In order to develop my account, I begin by locating current interest in emotions within its wider context, suggesting that it is informed by three existing bodies of geographical scholarship, which each offer important insights, but in certain respects also risk limiting the ways in which emotional geographies might develop. In order to advance existing debates about how emotion might be conceptualised, I then turn to psychotherapeutic ideas. Drawing attention to key limitations of existing geographical engagements with this body of work, I argue that psychotherapy offers a theory of

practice, which provides important insights for geographers interested in developing relational approaches to emotional geographies. It is not my intention to claim that this is the only way to theorise emotions relationally, but simply that psychotherapy provides one set of resources through which this goal can be realised.

My approach draws on my own hybrid position between geography and the field of psychotherapies<sup>1</sup>. Given the cultural pervasiveness of psychotherapeutic discourses, perhaps we are all in some ways inside their grip (Furedi 2003; Nolan 1998; Parker 1997; Rose 1990). However, in my own case, insiderness has been actively and self-consciously chosen and constructed in the sense that I hold accredited practitioner membership of a professional body for counselling and psychotherapy as well as being an academic geographer. This dual professional identity means that, in certain respects, I embody a conversation across the two respective disciplines. Doreen Massey (2004) has recently described the sheer hard work required to enable and sustain effective interdisciplinary communication. Even when such conversation is located within one person, the task is, I would argue, still difficult and challenging. In so far as this article articulates such a conversation, it has, in effect, taken several years to produce.

## **Geography's Emotional Turn**

In 2001, an editorial in *Transactions* by Kay Anderson and Susan Smith called for consideration of a variety of emotional geographies as an arena in which to deepen and extend geographical research agenda. In 2002, a conference at Lancaster University organised by Joyce Davidson entitled "Emotional Geographies" solicited over 80 papers, suggesting that researchers in geography and a range of other disciplines had taken heed of, and were answering, Anderson and Smith's call. The 2003 and 2004 annual conferences the Association of American Geographers both included several sessions with titles like "spatialising emotions". Many papers from these various conference are now coming through to publication (see for example *Gender, Place and Culture* 11, 3; *Social and Cultural Geography* 5, 4; Davidson *et al.* 2005) and it appears that a sub-discipline of emotional geographies is speedily and energetically coming into being.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term "psychotherapies" as an inclusive descriptor of a range of related practices that include counselling, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, analytic psychology, arts therapies and many more, informed by humanistic, psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioural theoretical orientations.

In some ways, geography is following rather than leading in this upsurge of interest in emotions. For example, some 25 years ago, Arlie Hochschild (1979, 1983) set in motion a body of work on the sociology of emotions, while Michelle Rosaldo (1980) and Catherine Lutz (1988) did likewise in anthropology. It is easy to point to much older precursors in a diverse range of disciplines including philosophy, psychology and biology. Nevertheless, emotions do seem to be attracting particular attention right now across the disciplines, from neurobiology (Damasio 2000, 2003; Gerhardt 2004; LeDoux 1998), through philosophy (Nussbaum 2001), political science (Nolan 1998) and sociology (Barbalet 2002; Lupton 1998; Williams 2001), to cultural studies (Berlant 2004, Sedgwick 2003), as well as geography. This academic interest in emotions is inseparable from wider social, cultural and political trends, in which emotions have moved towards the centre of public life, commercial activity and consumption. As Arlie Hochschild (1983) noted over two decades ago, service sector workers are increasingly expected to make available and deploy "emotional labour", offering consumers particular kinds of commodified emotional experiences. For Nikolas Rose (1985, 1990), the "psy-disciplines" have been central to these trends, fostering the production of subjects oriented towards emotional dimensions of their experience. The rise of academic interest in emotions is, therefore, part and parcel of what some commentators have described - sometimes with considerable hostility - a more general the "emotionalisation" of culture, politics and social life (Furedi 2003; Berlant 2004). In this context, what we might call an emotional turn within and beyond geography may be just as much an uncritical manifestation of these wider processes as a critical response to them. Reflection on how emotions are conceptualised and on the politics of engaging with questions of emotion is therefore vital to the capacity of emotional geographies to advance geographical knowledge in significant ways.

In a recent article about the spatial politics of affect, Nigel Thrift (2004, 57) takes urban studies to task for its relegation of emotion and affect "off to the side". Perhaps because I have generally felt my own disciplinary position to be closer to margin than centre, I view the issues rather differently. I will come back to the distinction between affect and emotion in due course, but initially I want to suggest that there are clear connections between current concern with emotions (and with feelings and affect), and at least three pre-existing and sometimes overlapping geographical traditions, namely humanistic geography, feminist geography, and non-representational geography (compare Parr 2005). I argue that these traditions have each laid important foundations for the

development of emotional geographies but that each is also limited in certain important respects.

***Humanistic geography: foregrounding subjective realities and evoking emotions***

The criticism that human geography privileges objectivity and rationality at the expense of subjective aspects of life was a rallying cry for humanistic geography some three decades ago. While the term "emotion" may not have figured prominently in the work of humanistic geographers, the call to consider subjective dimensions of human life stimulated a substantial body of research that attended to how people feel and experience places and spaces (e.g. Buttimer and Seamon 1980; Ley and Samuels 1978; Rowles 1978). Inspired by philosophical movements such as phenomenology and existentialism, this work countered the objectifying tendencies associated with efforts to generate systematic, generalisable knowledge about the "external" world, and focused instead on questions of human meanings, perceptions and values. The concept of the "life-world", on which many humanistic geographers drew, offered a way of overcoming distinctions between objective and subjective, and between external and internal worlds. Humanistic geographers argued for a holistic understanding of human experience, in the sense that subjectivity was understood to pervade all that people do, including, for example, their economic as well as cultural activities.

Such ideas were used to advance powerful critiques of the damage wrought in the name of (de-humanising forms of) rational progress (e.g. Eyles 1985; Relph 1976; Tuan 1979). Much of this work was deeply concerned with feelings evoked by places, whether of love, hate, pleasure, pride, grief, rage, guilt, remorse and so on, although its conceptual focus tended to veer away from problematising or conceptualising the emotions it highlighted. Nevertheless, the legacy of this body of humanistic geography has helped to inspire current geographical engagements with emotion.

The flowering of humanistic geography in the 1970s developed in part as a critique and alternative to the notion of geography as a spatial science informed by the assumptions of neo-classical economics, in which human beings are assumed to behave as autonomous, economically rational actors. While behavioural geographers relinquished the assumption of economic rationality, humanistic geographers went further, posing important philosophical questions about fundamental qualities of human being. In this context, implicitly, if not explicitly, emotions were attributed to the inner, subjective worlds of

human individuals, often arising as responses to external stimuli, but felt by and belonging to human individuals.

According to its critics, humanistic geography was overly concerned with individual experience, and was limited by an understanding of human action that privileged human consciousness and human agency, and that assumed people to be self-contained, self-directing agents capable of self-knowledge, clearly demarcated from other people and their environments, even if motivated by non-rational attachments to them (Gregory 1981). This view of human beings, with its focus on individual subjectivity, conscious (albeit non-rational) intention, and agential capacities, could not, it was argued, attend adequately to how human action, consciousness and individuality are produced and shaped by non-conscious, non-individual and non-human processes (Chouinard and Fincher 1983; Kobayashi and Mackenzie 1989). Humanistic philosophies offer important insights through which such criticisms can be addressed. For example, Merleau-Ponty's account of perception locates intention and consciousness in bodily awareness and sensation rather than in cognition, and in so doing offers resources for rethinking the notion of selves discretely bounded from their perceptual environments, as recently elaborated in Joyce Davidson's (2003) phenomenological analysis of geographies of agoraphobia. But this potential was not realised in the disciplinary debates engendered by humanistic perspectives in the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite the rise of an array of approaches that "decentre" the self-possessed conscious subject, the attribution of emotions to individualised subjective experience has continued to be very influential within and beyond human geography. Indeed, in the decades since the heyday of humanistic geography this view of human subjectivity has become increasingly pervasive within western culture, fostered especially by the rise of the consumer-citizen associated with neo-liberalism (Larner 2000), and psychological theories that fuel a self-fulfilling cycle of pre-occupation with subjective experience, thereby fostering the pervasiveness of psychotherapeutic discourses noted above (Cushman 1995; Rose 1985, 1990, 1999)

Overall, therefore, the legacy bequeathed by humanistic geography to the emergent sub-discipline of emotional geography is simultaneously suggestive and problematic. On the one hand humanistic geography's commitment to attend to the full richness of subjective experiences of places and spaces has provided an important source of inspiration for geographical engagements with emotion. On the other hand, its failure to unsettle the



alignment of emotion with individualised subjective experience meant that it has not developed in ways that necessarily problematise the politics of liberal and neo-liberal individualism.

***Feminist geography: deconstructing rational/emotional and self/other binaries***

The vision of persons as autonomous, bounded, intentional agents has been challenged from many directions. In relation to the development of emotional geographies, one of the most relevant sources of critique and reworking has been feminist geography. Drawing extensively on poststructuralist ideas, key contributions to feminist geography have problematised the binary structure of much geographical thinking, and the alignment of these binaries (Bondi 1990; Rose 1993; Massey 1994). Thus, in addition to challenging assumptions about the binary categories men and women, feminist geographers have drawn attention to, and sought to destabilise, associations that link masculinity to rationality, mind and objectivity, while femininity is linked to emotionality, body and subjectivity (Longhurst 2001; McDowell 1999; Women and Geography Study Group 1997). Feminist geographers have therefore sought to undo the mapping of emotion onto and into women's bodies, at the same time as questioning the exclusion of emotion from the domains of rationality and masculinity.

Given the power of binary framings that construe femininity as "not rational", whenever feminist academics draw attention to traditionally feminised issues like emotions, there is a risk that one's own authority to articulate persuasive argument is undercut (Bondi 2004). Perhaps because of this, although feminist geographers have often focused on issues and topics conventionally excluded from, or regarded as marginal to, what counts as geographical knowledge, they have not necessarily made extensive use of what might be called "emotion" words. One of the main exceptions to this is research on geographies of women's fear. Addressing one of the gaps resulting from a general neglect of women's experiences, Gill Valentine (1989) helped to initiate a series of contributions that challenged assumptions about the irrationality of women's fear, drawing attention to fear-inducing environments (Pain 1991), and to the influence of fear in the production of embodied, gendered subjects (Davidson 2003; Day 2001; Koskela 1997; Mehta and Bondi 1999; Panelli *et al.* 2004). In so doing, feminist geographers have suggested that emotions permeate social and physical environments, as well as the subjective experiences of individuals. Thus, although emotions such as fear may be experienced as part of interior

subjective realities, in the context of feminist critiques of binary thinking, emotions are understood to be generated by and expressive of the wider social relations.

By questioning assumptions about the autonomy and boundedness of human subjects, feminist geographers have troubled distinctions between persons and environments as well as the boundaries around individuals (Rose 1993). In this context, the role of emotions has attracted particular attention in methodological debates. Once the idea of the researcher as detached, objective observer is relinquished, questions abound about the kind of positions researchers occupy and the consequences for the knowledge produced. The reflexive self-monitoring undertaken by researchers reveals a wide range of emotions, from the pleasures of conversations rich with mutual recognition and humour, to uncomfortable interactions steeped in anxiety, uncertainty and suspicion, emotions that flow between and among people and places, including researchers as well as those on whom their research focuses (see for example Avis 2002; Davidson 2001; England 1994; Gibson-Graham 1994; Gilbert 1994; Moss et al, 1993; Parr 1998; Rose 1997). Against this background, several recent contributions to discussions of fieldwork within and around feminist geography focus specifically and explicitly on emotional geographies of research relationships and practices (Bennett 2004; Bondi 2003a, 2005; Burman and Chantler 2004; Laurier and Parr 2000; Meth with Malaza 2003; Widdowfield 2000).

The unboundedness of human subjectivity has also been explored substantively by feminist geographers in ways that have contributed to the emergence of emotional geographies, often in the context of studies of embodiment (Longhurst 2000, 2001), disability and chronic illness (Dyck 1999; Moss 1999) and mental health problems (Parr 1999; Davidson 2003). Focusing on troubled and often "othered" subjective experiences, such research highlights how bodily boundaries are produced, performed, destabilised and redrawn in complex and often emotionally-charged ways. This body of work points towards conceptualisations of emotion as intrinsically fluid, embodied and relational (Ettlinger 2004; Bondi *et al.* 2005).

Through its deconstructive engagement with key binaries, including mind/body, rational/emotional and self/other, feminist geography offers some important resources for the development of relational emotional geographies. It has drawn attention to the relationality of emotion methodologically and substantively. Committed to the production of situated knowledges, feminist geography does not locate emotions in "others" from whom researchers remain detached, but instead resists the objectification of emotions,

which are portrayed as fluid and unbounded. But at the same time, feminist geographies of emotion remain equivocal about the powerful and widespread tendency to equate emotion with individualised human subjectivity. While offering alternative theorisations of subjectivity, feminist geography also insists on the importance of "giving voice" to marginalised subjects, hence the frequent use of verbatim quotations from transcripts of in-depth interviews. For example, in an essay on fear and safety, Ruth Panelli, Jo Little and Anna Kraack (2004) call into question a series of binaries using interview material to portray how individual women feel. This appeal to the authority of women's experience is one of the hallmarks of feminist work within and beyond geography, but the next approach I discuss is sceptical about the capacity of any kind of articulable experience to enable the development of emotional geographies in ways that locate and theorise emotions more broadly than within individualised subjective experience.

***Non-representational geography: beyond discourse, beyond cognition***

It is not only feminist geographers who have become increasingly interested in embodied emotions. Cultural geography in particular has been subject to reaction against approaches that focus on issues of representation and has responded to calls for much more attention to be paid to all that eludes discursive forms of representation (Thrift 1996, 1999; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). The plea for enlivened geographies capable of engaging with the myriad of transient and unarticulable practices that constitute everyday lives in ways that exceed representation, revisits, and brings new theoretical resources to bear on, longstanding questions about what it is that people do, as opposed to what they say they do (Lorimer 2004). In this context Nigel Thrift (2004) has emphasised the central importance of affect.

While Thrift (2004) often uses the terms emotion and affect more or less interchangeably, he tends to associate the former (emotion) with specific, nameable states (joy, shame, envy, pride etc.), empirically attributable to or claimed by individualised subjects, and the latter (affect) with that which is pre- or extra-discursive, non-individualised and mobilised conceptually rather than empirically. In so doing he follows nomenclature generally preferred by psychologists, who have tended to associate emotion more with cognition (as, for example, in Daniel Goleman's (1996) account of *Emotional Intelligence*), and affect more with the body (Probyn 2004). Since non-

representational theory seeks to challenge the privileging of cognition, affect is the more popular term.

Although some of the research inspired by calls to attend to the non-representational have drawn on talk and conversation as practices (doings) capable of illuminating feelings (e.g. Crouch 2001; Latham 2003), this work has generally eschewed the performativity of texts, and has privileged the non-verbal, within which the ineffability of feeling can perhaps more readily be emphasised (Harrison 2002). Following Nigel Thrift's (1997) appeal to dance as a body-practice capable of illuminating the non-representational, Derek McCormack (2003, 492) has used the example of Dance Movement Therapy to explore "how people [work] upon geographies of emotion and mood through movement", while Mark Paterson (2005) chooses the example of therapeutic use of touch in Reiki massage for similar reasons.

As Catherine Nash (2000, 656) has argued, such appeals risk reinforcing rather than deconstructing a binary opposition between the sensual and the intellectual, thereby downplaying the thoughtfulness of non-verbal practices. Partially countering this, Nigel Thrift (2004, 60) has insisted that "affect is a different kind of intelligence about the world". And yet he also emphasises the "otherness" of this affective intelligence, describing affect as non-reflective and indirect. More generally non-representational geography has been characterised by a wariness of forms of meaning-making that might somehow sequester those elusive qualities of quick and lively geographies that always exceed representability. Herein lies the paradox of non-representational geography: how can our own texts ever honour that which lies beyond the scope of discourse?

Non-representational geographies of affect do not seek to resolve this paradox but to work with it. For example, contributors proclaim the performative qualities of their own interventions, and draw back from advancing interpretative claims about the practices with which they engage (Dewsbury, 2000; Harrison 2002; McCormack 2003). In so doing they converge and sometimes overlap with feminist geographers' insistence on the embodied situatedness of knowledge claims (Moss 2005), but there are also tensions between the two approaches to emotional geographies. For example, Deborah Thien (forthcoming) argues that this work reinscribes a binary distinction between the personal and the political, deconstruction of which is central to feminist perspectives, and that it thereby repeats a familiar process of holding all that is emotional at a distance. In so

doing, non-representational geography avoids the kind of immersion within the medium of emotion through which situated emotional geographies might be produced.

At the risk of over-generalising and over-simplifying, I would suggest that feminist geographers find research informed by non-representational theory too abstract, too little touched by how people make sense of their lives, and therefore too "inhuman", ungrounded, distancing, detached and, ironically, disembodied. Conversely, those informed by non-representational theory find feminist work too reliant on cognitive ways of knowing (including especially individual accounts of experience), and insufficiently "transhuman".

### ***Advancing relational emotional geographies***

As I have outlined, the emergent body of emotional geographies draws on a range of precursors. Humanistic, feminist and non-representational geographies share an understanding of emotions as ubiquitous and pervasive. In this context each tradition offers important inspiration for the development of relational approaches to emotional geographies, but each is also problematic. While humanistic geography opened up space for engaging with subjective realities, it has not adequately called into question a view of emotion as located within individualised experience. Feminist geography has shown how emotions connect and flow between people, including researchers and research participants, but it too is reluctant to challenge the authority of individual accounts of experience. Non-representational geography has no such qualms but risks instead becoming too detached from ordinary, everyday modes of articulating emotion, and resists relinquishing the position of the rational knower surveying its subject(s) from a distance.

This review of traditions informing the development of emotional geographies highlights two important challenges. First, how can emotional geographies connect and engage with everyday emotional life without equating emotion with individualised subjective experience? This question is crucial in relation to the politics of emotional geographies: failure to trouble individualistic understandings of emotion suggests an uncritical relation to wider social trends, while detachment from everyday emotional life suggests an unwillingness to situate knowledge claims and unsettle the position of the rational knower. Secondly, how can emotional geographies connect and engage with expressions of emotion? In particular, how should the status of personal, articulated, accounts of emotion to be understood? Do they, as non-representational approaches suggest, deflect attention from the vitality of non-cognitive, non-reflective affects, or

are they, as feminist geographers suggest, resources for accessing emotional geographies? In the remainder of this paper, I argue that psychotherapy, and especially psychotherapy's theory of practice, offers important insights through which these questions can be addressed, and the oppositions implicit within them dissolved. In so doing I suggest that psychotherapeutic ideas can be mobilised in ways that emotional geographies to resist recuperation within objectifying approaches to knowledge production.

### **Psychotherapy's theory of practice and its relevance to emotional geographies**

As noted above, one of the factors associated with the emotionalisation of culture, and with the intensification of individualistic consumerism, is the growth of psychotherapeutic practices, and their insinuation into more and more aspects of human life (Cushman 1995; Furedi 2003; Nolan 1998; Rose 1985, 1990). This might, therefore, seem to be an unpromising and problematic direction in which to look for guidance in the development of relational approaches to emotional geographies. Certainly, while non-representational geographies have drawn upon therapies of movement and touch, they have generally emphasised their distance from psychotherapeutic approaches (McCormack 2003). However, such hasty dismissal risks overlooking the wealth of ideas inspired by self-reflexive practices that respond to expressions of emotional distress and unease. We might argue about the politics of psychotherapeutic encounters but psychotherapists have already been doing that for years (Rieff 1966; Kovel 1988, Lasch 1980). Entering into interdisciplinary conversations with psychotherapeutic practices does not foreclose criticism.

Geographers have, of course, drawn a good deal on psychoanalytic theory, especially during the past decade or so (Bondi 1997; Callard 2003; Kingsbury 2003; Parr and Philo 2003; Pile 1996; Rose 1995, 1996; Sibley 1995, 2002). However, these engagements have done little to enable conversations with ideas emanating from and inspired by psychotherapeutic practice. Indeed, I argue that for two reasons they have unwittingly tended to deflect attention away from psychotherapy as a theory of practice.

First, there has been a tendency to equate psychotherapy with psychoanalysis (Oliver 2003). While psychoanalysis has been enormously influential across the whole field of psychotherapy, it is not the only body of ideas informing psychotherapeutic theory and

practice. For example, the development of both humanistic and scientific (or cognitive) psychotherapies during the twentieth century has diversified the field substantially, and this diversification has impacted upon psychoanalysis (see for example Kahn 1991). Differences between, and debates among, approaches to psychotherapy are complex and difficult to summarise. However, among the most obvious differences are those associated with conceptualisations of the person: while psychoanalytic approaches theorise persons as conflictual, decentred and "other" to/than themselves, humanistic approaches typically deploy organic and ecological metaphors to theorise persons as always already whole and integrated, albeit sometimes distorted – other than their "true" selves – as a result of inhabiting damaging environments, and scientific approaches embrace Descartes' insistence on the power of the mind to theorise persons as governed by perception and cognition, which may be "faulty" but which can usually be "corrected" at least partially by cognitive methods. Despite the enormity of these differences, psychotherapists continue to recognise affinities and similarities between their modes of practice. Moreover, research comparing the outcomes associated with different approaches finds very little difference in effectiveness between practitioners informed by different theoretical orientations (Wampold *et al.* 1997). In addition, research with recipients about what they found helpful or unhelpful therapeutically indicates clearly and consistently that what they most value are generic (or "non-specific") qualities that focus on qualities of their experience of the therapeutic relationship rather than anything attributable to the specific theory on which practitioners draw (Howe 1993; Mearns and Dryden 1990). In this context, psychotherapeutic ideas can usefully be understood as offering a theory of practice, articulated in a variety of registers but capable of translation across diverse understandings of fundamental qualities of the persons involved in psychotherapeutic encounters.

Secondly, geographers' engagements with the psychotherapy have been further limited by a tendency to treat as unmarked or unqualified rather particular versions of psychoanalytic theory, especially those that draw primarily on Freud's earlier work, often refracted through Lacanian theory. One of the hallmarks of this work is its appeal to unconscious drives – especially libidinal drives – arising within the human organism, at odds with social norms and expectations, and therefore repressed in order to enable and sustain entry into the domain of human sociality. While a number of geographers have made use of other psychoanalytic traditions, these tend to be marked or qualified by their

particularity, as in references to object relations theory (e.g. Sibley 1995, 2001). Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy have complex historical geographies. In many contexts, including the UK and North America, psychotherapeutic practice is more strongly and immediately influenced by bodies of psychoanalytic thought traceable to Freud's later clinical papers and the ensuing post-Freudian debates, than to Freud's earlier work or Lacan's reading of it. What is distinctive about such work is its emphasis on the impulse to relate to others, leading to shift in focus away from unconscious biologically-derived drives, towards concern with intra-psychic and interpersonal relationships. The effect of the bias within geography has been to further distance geographical engagements with psychoanalysis from psychotherapy as it has developed in Anglophone contexts, and to underplay, if not completely overlook, the extent to which psychotherapy is constituted by its theory of practice, as well as the centrality accorded to relationships in much psychoanalytic theory.

While psychotherapy's theory of practice is by no means unified, it has become the terrain on which common ground has been built to enable psychotherapists to converse across differences in their underlying assumptions about the nature and development of human beings. In this context, I want to draw on two psychotherapeutic ideas, with a view to enriching geographers' engagements with questions of emotion. The first, which I discuss at greater length, concerns the relationality of emotion. The second returns to the distinction between affect and emotion, and between feelings and representations of feelings, which I argue are productively disrupted in psychotherapeutic understandings of practice.

### ***Relationality, emotion and practice***

Perhaps the most important and unifying presupposition of psychotherapy is its emphasis on relationships, especially on emotional or affective dimensions of relationships. The common assumption that psychotherapy is an individualistic project ignores the way in which psychotherapy is an intrinsically interpersonal, relational enterprise (Bondi 2003b). In this section I sketch out how psychotherapeutic understandings of the role of the therapeutic relationship have evolved and then draw out key implications for emotional geographies.

In the development of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, his formulation of the concept of the transference placed the relationship between analyst and analysand at the centre



of psychoanalysis. The idea of transference has acquired a tremendous amount of baggage, controversy and mystique. Notwithstanding extensive and important debates, at its core is a simple proposition, namely that we all carry the affective impress of our earliest patterns of relating into all of our subsequent relationships. In other words how we feel towards others in the present is influenced by - and to some extent transferred from - our past relationships. Consequently, psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, counsellors, doctors, colleagues, students, teachers, friends, children all necessarily receive from us ways of being, feeling and interacting that bear the traces of our personal histories.

Sometimes this idea is caricatured as meaning that everything we do as adults is somehow caused by what happened to us as infants and traceable to what early care-givers did. This neglects another of Freud's ideas, enriched by subsequent psychoanalysts, about the creativity of our psyches. With this in mind, the transference can be understood as expressing what Christopher Bollas (1989) calls our personal idiom, by which he means the creative way in which we each give unique form and character to our being, that being necessarily bearing the impress of our relationship to others, notably our primary care-givers on whom we were dependent when we were at our least formed and most malleable.

The idea of transference began as Freud's way of making sense of how the patients he saw related to him, and he soon came to understand it as the key to psychoanalytic treatment (Freud and Breuer 1893-1895/1955). For Freud the transference made the patient's issues directly available for psychoanalytic treatment, which he described as a process of repeating (unconsciously re-enacting within the analytic setting) and working through (making the underlying experiences available to thought and relinquishing symptoms by abandoning the unconscious re-enactment) (Freud 1914/1958).

One of the reasons why Freud's emphasis on the transference has been so controversial is because it is as much a key to the pernicious abuse of vulnerable patients as a key to valuable treatment. If the psychoanalyst has unique access to knowledge of the patient's problems, this invests him or her with an enormously powerful form of authority. As feminists have long noted, most famously in the case of his patient Dora, Freud sometimes used his ideas to reinforce patriarchal domination (Freud 1905/1953; Bernheimer and Kahane 1985). He was not necessarily successful (as in the case of Dora), but when he was, psychoanalytic treatment could be understood as a method of extending the means of oppression into people's minds. Thus, critics have argued that psychoanalysis *generates* profoundly abusive relationships (Masson 1984, 1989; Penfold 1998).

These criticisms of psychoanalysis have prompted a range of responses from outright rejection to reform from within. In what follows I briefly explore two strands of response from within the domain of psychotherapies, one psychoanalytic and one non-psychoanalytic, both of which retain but reformulate the core idea about the centrality of the relationship.

As his conceptualisation of transference developed, Freud acknowledged that transferential processes might also mark the responses of psychoanalysts (himself included) to their patients, which he called the countertransference. For Freud, the countertransference was a problem that could impede treatment and should be minimised by the psychoanalyst's own training analysis (Freud 1912/1958). During this, the would-be psychoanalyst would repeat and work through his or her own issues. This, Freud believed, would enable psychoanalysts to clear their psyches of anything that might interfere with their capacity to receive, in uncontaminated form, the patient's transference (Freud 1912/1958). On this view the trained psychoanalyst or psychotherapist should be able to differentiate between feelings that are, colloquially, "their own stuff" (the countertransference), and feelings that arise as a result of unconscious emotional communication from the other person (the transference).

Ensuing psychoanalytic debates about countertransference, unfolding especially from a paper by Paula Heimann published in 1950, challenged Freud's notion of a clear distinction between responses of psychoanalysts attributable to their own issues and attributable to their patients' transferences (Heimann 1950). Instead, practitioners informed by psychoanalytic theory, whether psychoanalysts, counsellors or anything else, have come to understand their emotional experiences in relation to those with whom they work in terms of transference-countertransference relationships that constitute a field brought alive between them and through which they both work. Understandings of the countertransference have shifted from viewing it as an obstacle, to understanding it as a crucial resource or ally (Hughes 2004). This has transformed the task of the practitioner away from providing something approximating as closely as possible to a "fully analysed mind" that serves as a "blank screen" onto which the patient's transference is projected, towards participating in a relationship saturated with emotion in order to make repetition available for reflection, and to facilitate processes of working through. Crucially, the feelings that practitioners experience in relation to those with whom they work are

understood as intrinsically transpersonal, that is, not as belonging to one person or another but as always inspired relationally and contextually.

This approach to the countertransference means that practitioners are no longer understood as authorised by virtue of having worked through all their own issues. Indeed, confronted also with the numerous challenges to traditional forms of professional authority that flowered in the mid-twentieth century, psychoanalysts began to emphasise how little, rather than how much, they knew, and more specifically that the psychoanalyst does not know more than the person with whom he/she is working. As D.W. Winnicott (1969/1971, 86-87) put it, "I think I interpret mainly to let the patient know the limits of my understanding. The principle is that it is the patient and only the patient who has the answer". Thus, psychoanalytic accounts of the therapeutic relationship elaborate a view of emotions as intrinsically relational as well as being intensely felt by the persons who together constitute the psychoanalytic dyad. As I will illustrate further in due course, this approach is of great relevance to geographical efforts to avoid the twin pitfalls of equating emotions with individualised subjectivity and conceptualising affect in ways that distance it from ordinary human experience (compare Pile 1991).

There are convergences between this reconceptualisation of the role of the psychoanalyst within the analytic relationship and reformulations advanced by humanistic psychotherapists. Among the latter, one of the earliest critics of the authority relations of psychoanalysis was the American psychologist Carl Rogers and it is his reformulation of the therapeutic relationship on which I focus here (Rogers 1951, 1961). Rogers' ideas generated what is now known as the person-centred approach, and contributed to the burgeoning of a wide range of non-psychoanalytic, humanistic approaches to psychotherapies in the middle of the twentieth century. Rogers came to view psychoanalytic theory as a completely unnecessary encumbrance that was far more likely to impede than to enable therapeutic work. He had no truck with the idea of the unconscious, drives, the transference or the countertransference, and was guided instead by a view of human subjectivity as always already containing the potential for benign and positive development. In this context he developed a theory of what he called the necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change, which focus entirely on qualities of therapeutic relationships (Rogers 1957). Although he originally set out six conditions, these are often reduced to three so-called "core conditions", empathy (the capacity of the psychotherapist to understand the other person's emotional

experience), unconditional positive regard (an attitude of non-judgementalism on the part of the psychotherapist) and congruence (the capacity of the psychotherapist to be truly him- or her-self, and therefore to be emotionally genuine and honest in the relationship with the other person) (for an influential interpretation see Mearns and Thorne 1988).

For Rogers, psychotherapists do not diagnose and treat by drawing on a body of quasi-medical or psychological theory. Instead they listen and seek to convey their understanding of the other person's emotional experience; they cultivate a form of acceptance sustainable in the context of deeply disturbed and disturbing behaviour, informed by a belief in the human potential for repair and positive self-development; and they meet with those with whom they work as emotionally open, honest and genuine people. Rogers insisted that "the individual has within himself or herself vast resources for self-understanding ... and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" (Rogers 1986, 135).

Although their underlying theories of subjectivity are very different, there are some important affinities between Rogers' emphasis on qualities of relating and the post-Freudian emphasis on the countertransference within psychoanalysis (Kahn 1991). Both traditions emphasise the centrality of a relationship in which the person who is seeking help is constructed as the one who "has the answers". Both describe the practitioner as a facilitator who provides an environment conducive to the discovery, realisation, negotiation, exploration or creation of those answers. The interpersonal flow of emotions helps to constitute this environment and it is the psychotherapist's responsibility to maintain key features of that environment, including its temporal and spatial boundaries and the capacity to reflect on characteristics of that environment.

These psychotherapeutic understandings of the dynamics of interpersonal relationships have been taken up by a few human geographers in relation to the construction and interpretation of fieldwork evidence (Bingley 2003; Bondi 2003; Pile 1991). My purpose, however, in summarising this key aspect of psychotherapy's theory of practice is to inform theorisations of emotion as intrinsically relational. To do so I offer a brief account of the mobilisation of emotion in psychotherapeutic (clinical) supervision (compare Bingley 2002), the implications of which I illuminate with reference to a recent contribution to the field of emotional geographies.

One of the key purposes of clinical supervision is to support practitioners to attend to how they feel (Holloway 1995; Page and Wosket 1994). Let me speak of this in the first

person. As clinical supervisee, I am asked how I feel and how I have felt in relation to someone with whom I am working. I am encouraged to acknowledge any kind of feeling or sensation, fleeting or persistent. This is not about providing a narrative or interpretative account, but about engaging with traces or associations however fragmentary, including bodily sensations, thoughts and fantasies as much as reports of emotions. These feelings are not understood as uniquely mine but as providing some kind of insight or perspective on the betweenness that is constitutive of relationships. This betweenness is understood as processual, as part of the movement or flow of emotions between and among people, including those present in supervision as well as in the clinical work in question. It is directly relevant to all kinds of (non-clinical) encounters and therefore to emotional geographies. Theoretically this perspective helps to illustrate and elaborate a conceptualisation of emotion that is both transpersonal and grounded in ordinary human experience. Methodologically it reminds us that we are necessarily embedded within the field of emotional geographies, our access to it simultaneously personalised and transpersonal. Put another way, psychotherapy's theory of practice suggests that a key means by which emotional geographies can be explored relationally is via what we experience as our own emotional life.

To illustrate what this might mean for geographical research, I take an example from the literature on emotional geographies. In a recent essay Katy Bennett (2004, 415) has urged geographers to "make more of emotion in research, moving discussion in geography beyond a focus on researchers' emotions [...] to bring the researched (and their emotional intelligence) sharply into focus too." While I agree with her overarching argument about the importance of attending to emotion, I would argue that it can only be achieved by moving beyond the idea that emotions are attributable either to researchers or to those she describes as "the researched". If we understand emotions as relational, they arise and flow between people, producing as much as manifesting what may be felt to belong to one person or another. Indeed, perhaps unwittingly, Katy Bennett illustrates this process in her own account. Although she acknowledges that "emotions [...] mediate fieldwork" (Bennett 2004, 415), she strives to keep the substantive focus firmly on the emotional experiences of her interviewees, and not to draw attention back to herself as interviewer, thereby insisting that emotions be attributed to one or the other, and, by implication, on the capacity to maintain distance emotional distance between them. And yet the integral part she played in the flow of emotions within the interview encounters is

evident in a variety of ways, from her interpretation of visual clues, through explaining non-verbal qualities of her utterances in an excerpt from a transcript, to the comment that sometimes she found she understood her interviewees' feelings quickly and sometimes she did not. These are ways in which she illustrates – implicitly rather than explicitly – the intrinsic relationality and betweenness of emotion. She cannot analyse the emotions attributed to her interviewees without these comments about herself.

In Katy Bennett's account, it turns out that emotional experience can only be understood and analysed via the relationship between herself and her interviewees. The relevance of psychotherapeutic understandings of the relational dynamics of emotion is well-illustrated in her observation about the varying ease with which she could make sense of what her interviewees felt. This observation suggests that she seeks to understand the other person's emotional experience through a process of entering into and engaging with his or her emotional environment, much as described in the psychotherapeutic literature I have discussed. Sometimes this process of entering in leads swiftly to emotional communication that creates a sense of understanding what the other person feels. Sometimes Bennett's participation in the flow of emotion generates a sense that what the other person feels is not readily communicable. Psychotherapeutic ideas suggest that the researcher senses the presence of feelings of some kind but cannot grasp the content of those feelings. As the relationship develops, the shape, form and content of emotion begins to come into view. Emotions are not necessarily easily recognised, named or understood by anyone involved in an encounter, therapeutic or otherwise. Nevertheless those involved experience one another and their environments in ways on which they may subsequently reflect, in a manner akin to clinical supervision, which, as I have described, supports practitioners to conceptualise such experiences relationally. This is relevant not only to fieldwork practices but also to how emotions are conceptualised and analysed: it illustrates, and highlights the relevance of psychotherapeutic approaches to the fluidity, betweenness and subjective relationality of emotions.

In this section I have elaborated the relevance of a core feature of psychotherapy's theory of practice – the centrality accorded to the therapeutic relationship – to emotional geographies. I have argued that different approaches to psychotherapy share a common understanding of the betweenness of emotion, and I have shown how this perspective is applicable to geographical engagements with emotion, helping to make sense of emotional dimensions of fieldwork encounters and informing conceptualisations of emotion. This

perspective provides a way of negotiating between personal, subjective, emotional experience and a relational theory of emotion. As the development of psychotherapeutic thinking about authority and emotion within therapeutic relationship indicates, it is also an approach that elaborates a situated account of meaning-making and knowledge production.

***Feeling symbolisation: representation and emotion revisited***

One of the key challenges for, and debates within, emotional geographies concerns the relationship between feelings themselves and representations or accounts of feelings. As I have noted, feminist geographers have generally accorded considerable value to accounts of marginalised experiences, including many emotional experiences, while advocates of non-representational approaches have sought to shift the focus of attention away from representations of feeling to feelingness itself. What I argue in this section is that the field of psychotherapy has the capacity to enrich geographers' engagement with representation and its limits in relation to emotions by reframing this distinction.

Psychotherapies are practices that invite people to communicate emotionally. Certain psychotherapies (notably psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and counselling) are sometimes described as "talking therapies" while "arts therapies" use music, visual creativity, enactment and movement to communicate. But alongside the use of different communicative media, vital similarities remain, most notably in the emphasis on the affective qualities of the therapeutic relationship. Thus, in the so-called "talking therapies", with which I am most familiar, silence, pacing, non-verbal utterances, voice timbre, and above all the felt sense that is communicated are at least as (and often more) important than words. Put another way, closer to the register of emotional geographies, therapeutic encounters conceptualise communication - including silence - as performative (compare Thien 2005). But its performativity is understood in complex ways that incorporate rather than bracket off representational, narrative or substantive meanings.

As I have already noted, Freud (1914/1958) described analytic treatment in terms of "repeating" and "working through". The transference-countertransference relationship constitutes repetition within a context designed to facilitate possibilities that offer more than endless repetition. Thus far, I have focused rather more on "repeating" than on "working through". For Freud "working through" meant making the power of unconscious patterns available to thought. According to a popular misrepresentation of psychotherapy this has been taken to mean that the practitioner explains to the person with whom they

are working the "real" meaning "behind" their words, thoughts, dreams and actions. However, for Freud, "working through" was never and could never be a didactic process but must be held within the (transferential) therapeutic relationship. He argued that the task of analyst is to hold the frame of the analytic encounter until the analysand is ready, willing and able to think about what has been instinctive, habitual and "known" in an embodied sense but unthought. He emphasised that this process cannot be hastened and requires great patience (Freud 1914/1958). This is a theme psychoanalytic and humanistic psychotherapists continue to emphasise, the scope for and timing of new insights or shifts in self-perception always being determined within the context of a therapeutic relationship, which, as I have already noted, constructs the "recipient" as the person who has "all the answers".

For Freud, making unconscious patterns available to thought entailed bringing them into language, but post-Freudian psychoanalysts in the object relations tradition, together with psychotherapists drawing on humanistic ideas, have argued that language is not essential to thought (see for example Bollas 1987; Sinason 1992). On this more inclusive conceptualisation of thinking, what matters is the capacity to symbolise. "Working through" is what happens when affective patterns in one's personal idiom can be symbolised, or symbolised anew, as well as felt. Symbolisation does not replace feelings but makes them available to thought (Wright 1991).

Psychotherapies enact an assumption that the capacity to bring unconscious processes or barely articulable and deeply troubling feelings into a symbolic register, or into a new kind of symbolic register, may be facilitated through a particular kind of relationship dedicated to this task. In other words, symbolisation is not accomplished by agents acting individually but is intrinsically relational. Drawing on both psychoanalysis and neuropsychology, Peter Hobson (2004, 24-25) describes the process thus:

"[an] individual's ability to think about, rather than avoid [and continuously repeat] emotionally important issues is affected by that stance of someone else ... One of the ways in which psychoanalysis works is by enabling someone to understand himself better through expressing things in words ... The ability to think and to speak in words (a form of symbol) and the ability to communicate with someone else who registers what you convey, may keep your heart from breaking ... [or] keep your mind from disintegrating."



Hobson draws upon an understanding of the core task of psychoanalysis (and other forms of psychotherapy) as meaning-making, which he describes as occurring *between* people, that is relationally. He argues that the capacity to generate new meanings relationally may make feelings bearable ("keep your heart from breaking") and/or may sustain the capacity for thought ("keep your mind from disintegrating"). His account thus suggests that feeling and thinking are two sides of the same coin. At the heart of psychotherapy lies the idea of holding open a space for processes of symbolisation into which people come to make new "sense" of themselves, their lives and their interpersonal relationships. This "sense" is simultaneously felt and thought, embodied and abstract, affective and emotional, performative and representational, personally experienced and relational. In this way, psychotherapy offers a framing that traverses distinctions between representations of emotion and the emotions themselves, and between emotion and affect.

## **Conclusion**

Emotions are an integral part of human life, which geographers cannot afford to ignore. The upsurge of interest in affective and emotional geographies is therefore most welcome. There are, however, risks that geographical work in this field merely reflects wider cultural trends that treat emotions as individualised attributes available for commercial and political exploitation. With a view to resisting such tendencies, and to foster the radical potential of taking emotions seriously, I have explored key ideas informing the emergence of geographical work on emotion. Through its holistic approach to subjectivity, humanistic geography provided an important impetus towards engaging with emotional dimensions of people's experiences of place and space. However, the potential for theorising subjectivity in ways that blur and rework distinctions between self and other, and between self and environment, remained under-developed, as a result of which humanistic geography did not challenge the idea that emotion is located within, and belonging to, the interior lives of human individuals. In different ways feminist and non-representational geographies have paved the way for more insistently relational approaches to emotion. Feminist geography has emphasised the fluidity and pervasiveness of emotion in the context of situated approaches to knowledge-production, in which researchers are understood as intrinsically connected to their research subjects. At the same time, feminist geography has insisted on the importance of first person accounts of experience, which are often understood as locating emotion within individualised

subjectivities. Non-representational geography has argued for direct, unmediated engagement with the performativity of everyday practice. However, in its insistence on going beyond the discursive, the cognitive and individualised experience, non-representational geography tends to hold everyday, personalised, emotional experience at a distance. Key challenges emerging from these traditions, therefore, concern the need to conceptualise emotion as relational but not impersonal, and the debate about the relationship between feelings and accounts of feelings.

In relation to these specific challenges, I have argued that psychotherapy's theory of practice offers valuable resources for the development of emotional geographies. I have drawn attention to how psychotherapies conceptualise emotion relationally as well as personally, suggesting that this approach offers geographers new ways of understanding what it means to engage in emotional geographies theoretically and methodologically. I have also drawn on psychotherapeutic ideas to explore distinctions between feelings and representations of feeling, and between affect and emotion, suggesting that these are unhelpful dualisms that detract from geographers' capacity to engage with the ubiquitous and pervasive presence of emotion.

In arguing for the relevance of psychotherapeutic thinking to geography, I am not advocating that geographers train as psychotherapists or seeking to blur the distinction between geographical research and psychotherapeutic practice. As I have argued elsewhere (Bondi 2003), geography and psychotherapy are both knowledge-producing activities, albeit differently oriented. As a clinical practice, psychotherapy focuses on the generation of new meanings within subjective experience. As academic practices, geography and psychotherapy seek to produce knowledge capable of informing others within and beyond their respective disciplines. In the case of psychotherapy, the writings it generates draw on, and are often oriented to, clinical practice. However, these writings are equally available for those willing to enter into interdisciplinary conversations, as I hope that I have illustrated.

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